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ABSTRACT

Because a review of the literature shows a relationship between reading and writing, a project devised for teaching college composition classes consists of five assignments, culminating with a formal research paper. Students begin the project by doing research on an essayist chosen from a list provided by the teacher. In the first assignment, students write a short process essay on how they found the general sources, list a bibliography of sources that a student might use, and compose a biobibliographical sketch of the author. The second assignment requires summaries of three essays on which students have decided to work and a statement of purpose. For the third assignment, a "directing theme," students use only the information obtained from the first assignment and from the primary source. The fourth assignment is a working bibliography of secondary sources, while the fifth assignment is a formal research paper. This five-assignment project has proven beneficial because students are working on similar projects, thus unifying the class while allowing for a wide variety of subject matter. (Examples of student writing are included.) (DF)

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A Research Project for the Rhetoric/Composition Classroom

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The attacks on modeling leave writing instructors with a major pedagogical problem: the rhetorical reader. One option, of course, would be to dispense with readers entirely, but few instructors are willing to admit that reading has nothing to do with writing. And as the market for rhetorical readers indicates, not many colleges and universities have stopped using them. The problem thus becomes how to integrate readers into the writing classroom without using selections as models and without divorcing the selections completely from writing assignments.

Some traditional methods for using reading selections are being resurrected, and several theorists have offered new solutions. Corbett's studies in classical rhetoric provide one recognizable way of using the reader. Kenneth Roemer argues for "inventive modeling," a kind of modeling that emphasizes process, not product. Elaine Maimon and other writing-across-the-curriculum proponents have suggested ways of using reading materials from other disciplines. And, using what he calls the "conversation model," Charles Bazerman advocates a method in which students synthesize information from readings and incorporate this information into their own writing.[1]

Methods for studying rhetorical form and structure, such as those proposed by Moffet, Britton, Kinneavy and D'Angelo, are perhaps now most often used with reading selections. As David

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Foster observes in A Primer for Writing Teachers, Moffet and Britton advocate the study of "relational systems"--the study of "the interaction among a speaker's strategies, speech and audience" (34). Kinneavy and D'Angelo, on the other hand, work with "categorizing systems" or the classifying of "topics, logical strategies, forms and styles" (34). All of the above theorists work with methods of analyzing discourse. I introduce students to these methods, and in class, we practise discourse analysis with the selections in the reader. We discuss such areas as purpose, audience, and subject matter and examine what rhetorical techniques the writers have used, effectively or ineffectively, to convey their themes to the given audience. For the research paper, students choose an essayist from a field of study that interests them, analyze the form and content of several essays, collect biographical information and critical statements from extended reviews and articles, and synthesize this information to write their research papers. In the process of writing the paper, students practice composition and become more apt in discourse analysis. The act of writing helps students to learn more about the choices writers make and about the options available to them as writers.

The project entails five separate assignments, one of which is the formal research paper. Students begin by conducting general research on an author from a list which I provide. The list includes both the names of authors and a brief three to five word description of the author's field or subject matter. In the first

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written assignment, students must fulfill three criteria: 1) a short process essay on how they found the general sources (i.e. subject encylopedias and specialized dictionaries) and on what kind of information each work contains; 2) a short bibliography of primary sources that the student might use; and 3) a bio-bibliographical sketch on the author. I encourage students to look at information for more than one author before they begin writing the assignment. Here, for example, is a paper one student submitted on Aldo Leopold. I have included below only the first part of the assignment.

Example: Assignment I, Part I

> My first step to find information about Aldo Leopold was to find the Biography and Genealogy Master Index. This gave me several places to look for information. The 1982 and 1983 supplements provided several more references.
>
> To obtain information about the author, I found the listing given in the master index. These included the Dictionary of American Biography, Who Was Who in the West, Something About the Author, and American Men and Women of Science. Each of these references gave similar background information and a listing of writings by Aldo Leopold. The reference Something About the Author also listed some places where critical reviews of Leopold's work might be found.
>
> Having a reference list of work by Aldo Leopold, I checked the LCS to see how many books and papers by Leopold were available for use. I found that most of Leopold's essays and papers were published in the books A Sand County Almanac and Round River. By checking these two books I have access to a large number of Leopold's essays.
>
> Using the listings from Something About the Author, I was next able to find several critical reviews of Leopold's work. These reviews were scattered throughout newspapers and magazines, but were easily found.
>
> After reading each of the short biographies and some of the critical reviews, I was able to get an idea of what issues concerned Leopold and what type of writer he was.
>
> --by Ronald Hochstrasser
> Fall 1984

I grade this assignment on both the clarity of the writing and the thoroughness of the research. Usually, I request that student mark

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the call numbers in the margins for easy reference.

The second assignment asks that students write brief summaries of three essays on which they have decided to work. Throughout the semester, the students write summaries for each selection they read for class. Thus, by this point in the semester, summary writing poses no new problems. Assignment 2 also calls for a statement of purpose. For example, the student might submit the following for a statement of purpose:

> I plan to examine Anais Nin's "Notes on Feminism" and "In Favour of the Sensitive Man" to determine the author's attitude toward men. I will look at the following rhetorical characteristics of the works: Nin's verbal attacks on both men and women and her subsequent conciliatory tone and gestures. I plan to show how these characteristics demonstrate that Nin is not excluding a male audience in these essays.

Before the students do any further research, they write the third assignment--the directing theme. For this theme, they use only the information they've obtained from their general research (assignment one) and from the primary source. Basically, the students write their research papers--without researching. For students intimidated by the published word, this step seems particularly important. In writing the directing theme, students are forced to think about the primary source and to commit to paper some of their ideas. This assignment reinforces the premise that a research paper is still a paper where the student's voice and ideas about the material are of primary importance. It also helps me to spot potential problems that may develop during the project.

For assignment four, students return to the library to find

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appropriate secondary sources. They present their findings in the form of a working bibliography. I grade this assignment for correct bibliographical format and for quality of research.

Finally, assignment five asks the students to write the formal research paper complete with an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources and a precis. I generally schedule conferences between the rough draft and the final paper. For smaller classes, I have provided students with copies of essays that their classmates are analyzing. If, as a class, we have read and discussed all the authors being studied, peer editing works very well.

The research paper instruction unit that I have prepared for my students includes three sample research papers and runs several pages in length. What I have provided above is an outline of the project and what I offer below are the opening pages only of two student research papers.

An education major provides my first example. This student is interested in alternative teaching techniques and in writing styles that effectively communicate to both a specialized and a general audience. She finds in the writing of John Holt a model for teaching that appeals to her and a writing style that is not overly pedantic or technical.

John Holt's Educational Advice:
Easy But Important

> Different rhetorical techniques and approaches will determine the audience as well as what response the work elicits from this audience. John Holt's "How Teachers Make Children Hate Reading" provides a good example of the relationship between technique and audience. He discusses a

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serious issue in education with a simple approach that draws in both educators and parents.

By using a conversational mode throughout his essay, Holt reduces his position from that of authority to friend. He develops a rhythm in his writing by using relatively short paragraphs and sentences that resemble conversation. His average paragraph has five sentences and his average sentence consists of eighteen words. For example, he writes, "She had me. I don't know that we had a dictionary at home; if we did, I didn't use it. I don't use one today. In my life I doubt that I have looked up as many as fifty words, perhaps not even half that" (224). Here, Holt works with four sentences with varying lengths of three, seventeen, five, and twenty words consecutively. He alternates the longer and shorter sentences to maintain a balance in his rhythm. Also, in these four sentences, Holt use thirty-eight single syllable words and only seven multi-syllable words.

This conversational mode differs from the approach of most educators. For example, Jonathan Kozol, another educator who discusses educational theory, has almost twice the number of words in two sentences that John Holt has in four sentences: [example follows]

--Kelly Kilian
Fall, 1984

In this example, the student writes about both the form and content of one of Holt's essays. She begins her paper by discussing Holt's style, specifically his use of what she chooses to call the "conversational mode." She follows this paragraph with an example from a work by another educator whose stance resembles Holt's, but whose style seems too complicated for the subject matter. [Most of my students are Neo-Aristotelians; they like to see the content and the form "match."]

The following example comes from a student interested in social issues. Because Frederick Douglass's vivid writing style attracted her, she chose to write about imagery in his "Reception Speech."

Frederick Douglass:
Appealing to Moral and Religious Values

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The "Reception Speech," one of many speeches that Frederick Douglass presented to the British public, exposes the abominations of slavery in the United States. Although many British people had ideas about American slavery, Douglass gave this speech to "paint" a clearer picture and to expose the realities of slavery. He appeals to the British public to encourage assistance in support for the abolition movement.

In the "Reception Speech" Frederick Douglass requested the help of the British public by appealing to their sense of Christianity in two ways. He first appeals to the British people's sense of moral and humanistic values, vividly describing the physical and emotional horrors of slavery. He then appeals to the British people's sense of religious values by pointing out the inherent contradictions between slavery and Christianity.

Douglass first sets the tone for his speech by explaining his need to speak to Christians abroad. His use of vivid imagery illustrates the anguish of his bondage and his exasperation toward slavery:

> The curtain which conceals their crimes is being lifted abroad; we are opening the dark cell, and leading the people into the horrible recesses of what they are pleased to call their domestic institution. Some Negro has burst through the dark incrustation of slavery, and is now exposing their deeds of deep damnation to the gaze of the Christian people of England. (319)

This appeal sets the tone for his later use of specific examples and experiences in slavery. Douglass uses the phrase "curtain which conceals their crimes," illustrating his need to uncover the true realities of slavery, those actions that don't appear to outsiders. Slaveholders hope to mask the abominations of slavery; Douglass hopes to expose them, to lift the "curtain."

Douglass not only wants to expose the realities of slavery but also to agitate the American slaveholders by "opening the dark cell and leading the people into the horrible recesses of what they are pleased to call their domestic institution." Throughout the speech, Douglass uses the words, "dark cell" as if he were drawing the connection between the "dark cell" and hell. Douglass points out that the prevalent ethnocentric "white" attitude of slaves as inherently bad, the association of black in all of its manifestations with hell. As Christians, perhaps the British drew these same connections. For Douglass the slavery instituted by whites was hell; he wants to reverse the connotations associated with the color black.

Rhonda Kantor
Fall, 1984

This paper resembles a literary analysis in several respects,

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but I would like to point out some differences. I would like to point out some differences. First, the student begins this analysis by attending to the relationship between writer and audience, an area of particular interest for those concerned with non-fiction prose or expository writing. Secondly, she discusses imagery as a rhetorical technique with one purpose in mind: to show how Douglass persuades. In other words, what she studies is a "relational system" or the way that the writer, audience, purpose and strategy interact in prose. This kind of analysis stems directly from the work of Moffet and Britton. The project uses the theory self-reflexively; students study relational systems, write about relational systems, and think about relational systems in the process of writing.

Based on my experience teaching this unit, I see the following benefits. The project offers students a range of subject matter. Yet, because everyone is working on a similar project--an analysis of several essay by one writer--the project unifies the class. Moreover, in order to write their papers, students must integrate both the writing and the reading skills they have learned in class. Thus the project reinforces what has been taught in the classroom during the semester. One student confessed after completing the project, "I never quite understood how you were 'breaking down' those essays in class. This paper made me learn what you were talking about." While I was dismayed to learn that the student had not understood class discussions, I was happy to discover that practice supports theory, that the act

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of writing is, as Toby Fulwiler suggests, "an act of cognition" or an act of learning. In doing this project, both my students and I have learned more about the work of various essayists and have grown to appreciate and understand the diverse types or "genres" of non-fiction prose. As with all research projects, students learn to form their own ideas and arguments by evaluating and synthesizing the ideas of others. As a result, the students' own ideas become necessarily more sophisticated.

Notes

[1] See Edward P.J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971); Kenneth Roemer's "Inventive Modeling: Rainy Mountain's Way to Composition," College English 46 (1984), 767-782; Elain Maimon et al., Writing in the Arts and Sciences, (Boston: Little Brown, 1981); and Charles Bazerman, "A Relationship Between Reading and Writing: The Conversation Model," College English 41 (1980), 656-661.

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